

ROM. 15:14 – 16:27

By Ashby L. Camp

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VII. The Letter Closing (15:14 - 16:27)

A. Paul's ministry and travel plans (15:14-33)

1. God's chosen minister to the Gentiles (15:14-21) – **¹⁴Now my brothers, I am convinced about you, I myself, that you yourselves are also full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵But I have written to you rather boldly in part, as one who reminds you, because of the grace that was given to me from God ¹⁶that I might be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving the gospel of God as a priest, in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷Therefore, I have [this] boasting in Christ Jesus with reference to what concerns God. ¹⁸For I will not dare to say anything except what Christ accomplished through me for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, ¹⁹by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit [of God], so that from Jerusalem and around as far as Illyricum I have completed [the preaching of] the gospel of Christ, ²⁰but in this way, by striving eagerly to preach the gospel where Christ was not named, so that I not build on another's foundation. ²¹Rather, just as it is written, "Those to whom it was not announced concerning him shall see, and those who have not heard will understand."**

a. In vv. 14-16 Paul assures these Christians in Rome, whom he has never visited, that he did not intend by his letter to call into question their spiritual maturity. Rather, he wrote them as he did because God has made him a minister of Christ to the Gentiles. He serves the gospel as a (metaphorical) priest whose role is to present the Gentiles to God as an acceptable offering, meaning as people who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

b. He says in v. 17 that, because he has been called by God in this way ("Therefore"), he can legitimately boast in Christ about that ministry. It is not a boasting about his own achievements but a boasting in what Christ has accomplished through him.

c. In vv. 18-19a he says that the success of his ministry is due to divine enablement. Christ is the active worker; Paul is simply the instrument. Gentiles were brought to obedience by both "word and deed," which includes miracles (signs and wonders), and all of which was accomplished through the power of the Spirit.

d. The result of this divinely driven ministry was that, from Jerusalem to Illyricum (a coastal province northwest of Macedonia, right across the Adriatic Sea from Italy), Paul had planted strategic churches in all these regions (v. 19b). As Knox puts it, "[the message had been] 'proclaimed' widely enough and [the church had been]

'planted' firmly enough to assure that the name of Christ would soon be heard throughout its borders."

e. Paul explains in v. 20 that the manner in which this was done was by striving eagerly to preach the gospel where there was no worship of Christ at all. In other words, Paul saw his particular mission as planting strategic churches in virgin gospel territory. Of course, in fulfilling this pioneer-church planting ministry, Paul often engaged in other ministry activities and worked with churches that he did not plant (e.g. Antioch).

f. Paul in v. 21 cites Isa. 52:15b for the point that his church-planting ministry among Gentiles is fulfilling the O.T. prediction about Gentiles coming to see and understand the message about the Servant of the Lord.

2. Plans to visit Rome (15:22-29) – **²²For this reason, I was also frequently hindered from coming to you. ²³But now, no longer having a place in these regions and having had a longing to come to you for enough years, [I plan to] ²⁴when I go to Spain, for I hope to see you when passing through and by you to be helped on my way there, if first I may for a time be filled full of you. ²⁵But now, I am going to Jerusalem to render a service to the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to do some sharing for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷For they were pleased, and they are their debtors; for if the Gentiles shared in their spiritual things, they are also obligated to minister to them in fleshly things. ²⁸Therefore, after completing this and having sealed this fruit to them, I will go by way of you to Spain. ²⁹And I know that when coming to you, I will come in the fullness of Christ's blessing.**

a. Paul explains in vv. 22-24 that the demands of his ministry in planting churches from Jerusalem to Illyricum had often prevented him from coming to Rome. But having planted churches in those regions, he hopes to visit Rome on his way to planting the church in Spain.

b. He says in vv. 25-27 that first he is going to Jerusalem to deliver the collection taken from the Gentile mission churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem (v. 25). Those Gentiles were not *legally* obligated to send this money, as in the case of the Jewish temple tax, but they were indebted to the Jewish Christians as the people through whom they received the blessings of Christ. The salvation of the Gentiles comes only by way of the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel (1:16, 4:13-16, 11:17-24, 15:7-9).

c. In vv. 28-29 he says that after delivering the collection and "having sealed this fruit to them," he plans to head to Spain by way of Rome. "Sealing" is often an official affirmation of authenticity, so "sealing" the collection (fruit) perhaps refers to Paul's vouching for the contents, both in terms of amount and purpose. With that mission accomplished, Paul knows that his visit to Rome will be with the full blessings of Christ. In other words, he would not have gone prematurely.

d. We do not know if Paul ever got to Spain. The N.T. never reports such a visit; and the evidence of the Pastoral Epistles suggests that Paul turned back to the east after his trip to Rome. But part of 1 Clement, a letter from Clement of Rome to the Corinthians dating around A.D. 95, can be interpreted to suggest that he did reach Spain.

3. Request for prayer (15:30-33) – **³⁰Now I urge you, [brothers], through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to struggle with me in prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹so that I may be rescued from the disobedient in Judea and my service to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²so that coming to you in joy through the will of God, I might find rest with you. ³³May the God of peace be with you all, amen.**

a. Paul in vv. 30-31 urges the Christians in Rome to struggle with him in prayers on his behalf that he might be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. And as we know from Acts 21:27-36, the Romans took him in custody to keep the Jews from killing him.

b. Paul also wants them to pray that the collection will be accepted by the church in Jerusalem. This collection and its reception were loaded with theological overtones. The contribution showed the Gentiles' appreciation of Jewish primacy in the gospel, and the acceptance showed the Jews' acceptance of these churches in the one community of faith. There were conservative Jewish-Christian groups that continued to be hostile toward Paul, and he was concerned that the gift might be rebuffed.

c. If this happens, he might come to them in joy, if it is God's will that he come, and be refreshed by them (v. 32). Verse 33 expresses Paul's desire for God's blessing on their community.

B. Greetings (16:1-23)

1. Commendation of Phoebe (16:1-2) – **Now I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is [also] a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ²that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and may assist her in whatever matter she has need of you, for she herself has also been a benefactor of many, myself included.**

a. Paul commends to the Roman Christians a sister in Christ named Phoebe. She may well have been the person who carried Paul's letter to the Romans. She is described as a "*diakonos*" of the church in Cenchrea, which has fueled debate about whether the early church had women "deacons" in the sense of servants who were formally appointed by the church.

(1) The word means "servant" and is used in that general sense many times in the N.T. So one must look beyond the word itself to determine whether Paul uses it here as a description or as a title.

(2) Historically, apart from an equally ambiguous reference in Pliny's letter to Emperor Trajan (about A.D. 110), there is no mention of female deacons until the third century. That, coupled with the emphasis on male leadership in the church and what I consider the most likely interpretation of 1 Tim. 3:11 ("wives" of deacons), leads me to favor the general term "servant."

b. But granting that Phoebe was not a "deacon" in the formal appointed sense, this woman was obviously an important member of the church in Cenchræa and highly esteemed by Paul.

(1) He asks the Romans to receive her in a manner worthy of the Lord and to help her in whatever way she needs help.

(2) Paul describes her as a "benefactor" or "patron" of many, including himself. According to Moo:

A "patron" was one who came to the aid of others, especially foreigners, by providing housing and financial aid and by representing their interests before local authorities. Cenchræa's status as a busy seaport would make it imperative that a Christian in its church take up this ministry on behalf of visiting Christians. Phoebe, then, was probably a woman of high social standing and some wealth, who put her status, resources, and time at the services of traveling Christians, like Paul, who needed help and support. Paul now urges the Romans to reciprocate.

2. Greetings to Roman Christians (16:3-16) – ³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their own neck on behalf of my life, to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the Gentiles, ⁵and [greet] the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epenetus, who is the firstfruits of Asia for Christ. ⁶Greet Mary, who labored much for you. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. ⁸Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, one approved in Christ. Greet those from the [household] of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those from the [household] of Narcissus who are in the Lord. ¹²Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis who labored much in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus, the elect in the Lord, and the mother of him and of me. ¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them. ¹⁵Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

a. There was a tendency in the ancient world to give certain names to certain kinds of people. Moo says these studies show that a majority of the names are Gentile and that the majority of the names are those of slaves and "freedmen," or the descendants of slaves/freedmen.

b. Paul refers to at least three house churches (vv. 5, 14, 15) in this greeting. As Moo notes:

Early Christians did not have large public facilities for meeting, so they used their own houses. And since even the largest house of the wealthiest Christian would hold no more than seventy or eighty for worship, growth beyond that point required that the Christians split up into house churches.

c. Verse 16:7 has received much attention in recent discussions about women's role in the church.

(1) The second name in 16:7 is probably the feminine name "Junia," in which case Andronicus and Junia are probably husband and wife. It is possible, however, that the second name is the masculine name "Junias" (a contracted form of Junianus) instead of the feminine name "Junia" ("Junias" in ERV, ASV, RSV, NAS, NIV['84]). In that case, they are two Jewish brothers in Christ.

(2) It also is unclear whether Paul means that Andronicus and Junia(s) were themselves *apostles* who were noteworthy or that they were well known *to* the apostles. Several recent translations (NET, ESV, CSB) reflect the latter.

(3) If Andronicus and Junia(s) are in fact referred to as "apostles," it would be in a nontechnical sense that they were traveling missionaries. The word "apostle" is used elsewhere in the N.T. in a nontechnical way (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25), and it is used of traveling missionaries in the Apostolic Fathers (Did. 11.3-6; Herm. *Vis.* 13.1; *Sim.* 92.4; 93.5; 102.2). Schreiner remarks (p. 797), "One should scarcely conclude from the reference to Junia and the other women coworkers names here that women exercised authority over men contrary to the Pauline admonitions in 1 Tim. 2:12."

d. It is noteworthy that Paul mentions nine women in this list, five of whom are commended for their labor in the Lord. Though women cannot assume the same roles as men in the church, they were active and important members in the community of faith.

e. I do not understand the command in v. 16 that they "Greet one another with a holy kiss" as a command to kiss. As Moo says, "[t]he kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world generally and in Judaism especially." Paul *assumes* they'll greet by kissing but commands that it be a "*holy* kiss." He is saying, "The kiss with which you greet one another is to be holy," meaning a kiss that is a genuine expression of Christian love. The greeting is not to be duplicitous, as was the kiss that betrayed our Lord. If a commander wrote to his troops: "Greet President Obama with a respectful salute," his point would not be that they are to salute – that is a given – but that *when* they salute they do so with the respect that is due the office of President.

3. A warning, a promise, and a prayer (16:17-20) – ¹⁷**Now I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who create dissensions and causes for offense contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.** ¹⁸**For such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own belly, and through smooth speech and well chosen words deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.** ¹⁹**For [the report of] your obedience has reached all people. Therefore, I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise toward the good and innocent toward the evil.** ²⁰**And the God of peace will swiftly crush the Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.**

a. In vv. 17-18 Paul warns them to watch out for those who create division in the church and threaten the spiritual lives of the members by teaching what is contrary to what they had been taught. He seems to have a certain group in mind, perhaps the Judaizers who plagued him throughout his ministry. They are to avoid or turn away from these false teachers because they are not serving the Lord and because they are able to deceive the unsuspecting by their smooth talk.

b. He notes in v.19 that the existence of the church in Rome was well known, and with that kind of profile it is only a matter of time before the wolves arrive ("For"). Paul, of course, rejoices over them, but he wants them to be "innocent" in terms of evil but "wise," meaning not naive, in terms of false teaching. As Bruce puts it, they should not be "so 'simple-minded' that as to swallow whatever is offered." It's the idea behind Jesus' saying about being "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mat. 10:16).

c. As they practice that discernment, God will give them swift victory over the Satan-inspired heretics who arrive to trouble them (v. 20a). And Paul adds a prayer for the grace of the Lord Jesus to be with them.

4. Greetings from Paul's companions (16:21-24) – ²¹**Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, and [so do] Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.** ²²**I, Tertius, who wrote the epistle, greet you in the Lord.** ²³**Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and [so does] Quartus, the brother.**

a. Paul's companions here include their greetings to the Roman brothers and sisters. Jason is probably the person from Thessalonica mentioned in Acts 17:5-7, 9, and Sosipater is probably the Berean named Sopater in Acts 20:4.

b. Tertius is the secretary who actually wrote the letter under Paul's direction. Gaius is probably the same person mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:14 as one Paul baptized. Erastus is described here as the city's "treasurer," and this is probably the same Erastus mentioned in an inscription from Corinth. Nothing else is known of Quartus.

5. Concluding doxology (16:25-27) – ²⁵**Now to him who is able to establish you, in accordance with my gospel, that is, the preaching of Jesus Christ, in accordance with the revelation of the mystery; having been kept silent through times eternal** ²⁶**but now having been displayed and through the prophetic scriptures, in**

accordance with the command of the eternal God, having been made known for [bringing about] the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles; ²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to him be glory forever, amen.

Paul ends the letter with a doxology in praise of the God who has in the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed the climax of salvation history. Schreiner comments (p. 810):

Paul prays that God will receive the glory for the gospel that has now been revealed. This gospel was both hidden and prophesied in the OT, but the age of fulfillment has come so that the mystery that was shrouded in the past and prophesied is now publicly declared and being fulfilled. The gospel centers on Jesus the Messiah, for he fulfills the saving promises of the OT, and these promises are being realized in the inclusion of all nations into the people of God. As the Gentiles exercise the obedience that comes from faith, they show that they are the children of Abraham. God's saving plan, which includes Jews and Gentiles and is effected through Jesus the Messiah, is wisely constructed so that he receives that glory and praise forever.